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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MONROVIA 001423

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, PM/RSAT AND PM/ISO
POSTAL SERVICE FOR CHIEF INSPECTOR LAZAROFF

E.O. 12598: N/A

TAGS: [ECPS](#) [EAID](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [OTRA](#) [LI](#)

SUBJECT: LIBERIA'S POSTAL SYSTEM GETTING BACK ON TRACK

1. (SBU) Summary: Liberia's Postal system is struggling to reconstitute itself after being totally destroyed during the 14-year civil war. There is strong commitment by the Director General of Posts to improve service and the just-announced replacement of the Minister of Post and Telecommunication (MPT) is expected to be a positive change. During a week-long visit, the Chief Inspector of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and his team conducted training and surveyed security and operations at key Liberian postal facilities. The U.S. DOD's Africa Partnership Station will deliver donated U.S. postal equipment to Liberia in March 2008, which could mark the beginning of ongoing USPS assistance and support for Liberia Post. We understand there might also be mobile post offices available from FEMA for donation to Liberia Post. End summary.

2. (U) Alexander Lazaroff, Chief Postal Inspector and Chief Security Officer for the U.S. Postal Service, accompanied by Oscar Villanueva, Inspector in Charge, Global Security and International Liaison and by Shawn Tiller, Inspector in Charge of the Denver office, visited Liberia December 2-7 to conduct a security assessment of Liberia's postal system, provide training for postal inspectors and prepare for delivery of 30 pallets of donated equipment from USPS. The equipment will arrive in March 2008 as part of the U.S. Navy's Africa Partnership Station. During his introductory meeting with the Ambassador, Lazaroff mentioned that he had tried unsuccessfully to arrange delivery of surplus FEMA trailers in 2007 for use as post office facilities, but they might be a possibility on future APS voyages. (The trailers had been offered to the USPS for bomb detonation practice but Lazaroff indicated FEMA had refused to release them to USPS for donation to Liberia.) Radio reporters covered the initial meeting between Chief Lazaroff and then-MPT Minister Jackson Doe, and there have been several newspaper articles reporting on the final press conference.

Starting from Scratch

3. (SBU) The Liberian postal system was completely destroyed during the 14-year civil war but is crawling back. The ministry building (and main post office) sheltered refugees during the war and has been stripped to the concrete frame. Remnants of metal protruding from the walls indicate where equipment was looted. The delegation observed the dead-letter pile, containing mail from before the Liberian civil war. Electricity, including in stairwells, is absent or spotty. The postal warehouse at the port, situated on the end of the collapsing main pier, is abandoned and unusable, with a hole in the floor that goes through to the water. At the airport, MPT postal officials do not have tarmac access and incoming mail routinely arrives with items missing. There is no address system for mail delivery, even in Monrovia. As Chief Lazaroff observed, Liberia Post lacks even such basic items as tables for sorting the

mail. Although MPT does not have statistics on mail volume, it is far below that of even the smallest U.S. town and most Liberians are still unaware the postal system is functioning at all.

¶4. (SBU) The postal personnel system is in equally rudimentary condition. There has been no training for 14 years, and personnel are either new (and occasionally unpaid) or nearing retirement. The Director General of Posts, a USPS alum, does not control the hiring and firing of postmasters or other employees and does not have access to a complete list of postal employees. For the USPS security training, MPT recruited the cream of the crop -- corralling as many high school graduates as possible for the two-day training on basic postal security. The 30 students were enthusiastic and involved, but had not received any prior training. Some were not actually on the MPT payroll, saying they worked as volunteer inspectors. There is no system of ID badges or uniforms. Although there are some postal employees with pre-war experience, they are rare, nearing retirement, and worked in a system characterized by patronage and corruption.

Slight Progress Already, but Much More to Do

¶5. (U) The MPT has reopened post offices in five counties and plans continued expansion. Stamps have been issued, and outgoing international mail works well. During a lunch hosted by the Ambassador, both sides were able to review the current status and future possibilities of Liberia Post. The Director of Security at the airport, on hearing at the lunch from the U.S. delegation the problems caused by lack of tarmac access for postal officials, and learning such access is standard in other countries, acknowledged he hadn't responded to MPT's request for access but now understood its importance. He agreed to follow up with the Director General of Liberia Post.

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¶6. (SBU) The U.S. Marine Corps advance team for the Africa Partnership Station, visiting at the same time as the USPS team, was able to survey proposed storage sites for the donated postal equipment that will be arriving in March. MPT confirmed the GOL will handle customs exemption procedures and distribution of the equipment in-country.

Recommendations for Improvement

¶7. (SBU) Chief Inspector Lazaroff provided MPT Minister Doe with a list of both long and short-term recommendations. (Note: We will pass the list to the incoming Minister, who was designated mid-way through the visit. End note.) Short term recommendations include providing employee identification badges and uniforms, creating job descriptions and standardized procedures (such as affixing stamps in the customer's presence, not afterwards) and establishing a list of current equipment and future needs.

¶8. (SBU) Longer-term recommendations include determining the mail delivery system best suited to Liberia, creation of a budgeting process and establishment of an address and zip-code system for Liberia. More fundamentally, MPT leadership should establish a concept for the role of the postal system: will it be autonomous, as in the United States, a subsidized part of the GOL, or a hybrid?

New Minister Greeted with Optimism

¶9. (SBU) Mid-way through the visit, President Sirleaf announced that the current minister of Post and Telecommunications, Jackson Doe, would be changing jobs with Jeremiah Saluteh, currently Minister of Transportation. Our contacts agree the change will benefit the postal service, despite the lack of continuity. The USPS delegation established strong working relations with the Deputy Minister and the Director General for Posts, who will continue to have responsibility for Liberia's postal system.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) The visit promises to be the start of ongoing bilateral cooperation. Chief Inspector Lazaroff observed that the complete destruction of the postal system will make it easier to rebuild on a sound foundation, compared to trying to reconstitute a large but (dys)functional system. He confirmed the USPS should be able to continue to provide redundant postal equipment at almost no cost if DoD is able to continue to provide delivery assistance via the Africa Partnership Station. However, Liberia Post will have to undertake fundamental management improvements before it is in a position to really benefit from further training visits.

11 (U) The USPS delegation cleared this message.

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